

Soccer Roundup

Tierney sidelined

FIFA 'told' to recover cash

LONDON, Dec 11, (Agencies): The FIFA governance committee has told the soccer body's leadership to pursue legal action against Michel Platini to recover the 2 million Swiss francs (\$2 million) that led to the former UEFA president being banned from the sport.

The payment was exposed in 2015 as having been approved by Sepp Blatter, which led to the Swiss official being ousted as FIFA president.

FIFA governance committee chairman Mukul Mudgal wrote to FIFA deputy secretary general Alasdair Bell saying the body had passed a resolution over the wrongful payment.

"The FIFA administration (should) take the necessary steps before the relevant authorities in Switzerland against both Mr Blatter and Mr Platini with a view to ensuring that the CHF 2 million unduly paid by Mr Blatter to Mr Platini is returned to FIFA (together with interest, at the appropriate rate) and the disciplinary fines and costs imposed are recovered," Mudgal wrote in a Nov. 25 letter



Platini

seen by The Associated Press. Platini can work again in soccer because his four-year ban expired in October. But any comeback into a senior role would likely force him to first pay FIFA a fine of 60,000 Swiss francs (\$60,300) that is three years overdue. Legal action would also seek that fine to be paid up.

Platini was the heir apparent to Blatter as FIFA president in 2015 until they were both toppled from power.

Blatter is still serving a six-year ban, upheld by the Court of Arbitration for Sport after being imposed in 2015, for authorizing the payment to Platini in 2011 as backdated salary for work as his adviser a decade earlier. Blatter also approved extending his former protégé's FIFA pension plan. Last month, a lawyer for Platini said the former France great was going to court to receive payments allegedly due in his UEFA employment contract worth 3 million Swiss francs (\$3 million) in annual salary and bonus.

Arsenal defender Kieran Tierney faces a spell on the sidelines after dislocating his right shoulder in Monday's Premier League win at West Ham United, the club said on Wednesday.

The 22-year-old left back was substituted just before the half-hour mark in Arsenal's 3-1 derby victory at the London Stadium after falling awkwardly and used his shirt as a makeshift sling as he left the pitch.

The club said Tierney would have another assessment while British media reported that the Scotland international could be out of action for three months if he has surgery.

Arsenal, who won their first match in all competitions since late October, visit Belgian side Standard Liege in their final Europa League Group F match on Thursday and Tierney is among a number of senior players who will not make the trip.

Sporting Kansas City fulfilled its need for an elite striker Tuesday by swinging a deal with Mexican club C.D. Guadalajara for Alan Pulido, who signed a four-year contract with the Major League Soccer club after it paid a club-record transfer fee.

The 28-year-old Pulido has scored more than 100 goals for Guadalajara and the Mexican national team. He's been part of five domestic championships, helped his club to the CONCACAF Champions League title last year, and finished atop the Liga MX scoring list with 12 goals during the Apertura season this past fall.

The club did not disclose the exact transfer fee, though it did acknowledge it was "multimillion dollars."

Sporting KC is coming off a season in which it failed to make the MLS playoffs for the first time in nearly a decade. A big reason was its inability to score - top striker Kristzian Nemeth had just eight goals and the club did not renew his option.

Jim Smith, a familiar and popular figure in English football as a manager with nine different clubs in a coaching career spanning nearly 40 years, has died at the age of 79, it was announced.

Smith, a down-to-earth character known fondly throughout the game as the "Bald Eagle," enjoyed success managing in the English top-flight at clubs including Birmingham City, Oxford United and Derby County.

"All at QPR are deeply saddened to have learned of the passing of former R's manager," said a statement from another of Smith's old clubs, Queens Park Rangers, who reached the League Cup final under his stewardship.

Barca knock Inter out of CL, Napoli sack Ancelotti after reaching last 16



Chelsea's Mason Mount fights for the ball against Lille's Renato Sanches during the Champions League Group H soccer match between Chelsea and Lille at Stamford Bridge stadium in London on Dec 10. (AP)

Liverpool, Chelsea advance as Valencia eliminate Ajax

MILAN, Dec 11, (RTRS): Inter Milan crashed out of the Champions League after 17-year-old Ansu Fati became the youngest scorer in the competition's history by firing in a late winner to seal Barcelona's 2-1 victory at San Siro.

Barca coach Ernesto Valverde rested Lionel Messi and several other key players for the trip to Milan, having already secured top spot in Group F, but Carles Perez put the Spaniards in front on his Champions League debut after just 23 minutes before Romelu Lukaku levelled on the stroke of halftime.

Inter striker Lautaro Martinez had the ball in the net twice after the break, only for both goals to be disallowed for offside, before Fati smashed in a sublime finish inside the final five minutes.

The Italian side needed to at least match Borussia Dortmund's result against Slavia Prague to maintain second place, but the Germans won 2-1 to

with 12 points, one behind Liverpool, while their Belgian opponents finished bottom of the group with one point. Salzburg came third to qualify for the Europa League last 32.

Genk's Maarten Vandevoordt, who at 17 years and 287 days became the youngest goalkeeper to play in the UEFA Champions League, had a nightmare start as he gave the ball away under pressure and allowed Milik to score in the third minute.

The Pole fired the second in the 26th minute and converted a penalty in the 38th before Dries Mertens, on his 300th Napoli appearance, completed the scoring with another penalty a quarter of an hour from the end.

Both Gazzetta dello Sport and Corriere dello Sport had reported before the game that Ancelotti was set to be fired whatever the result.

Ancelotti claimed after the game that he was still hopeful of keeping his job and that he was due to meet club owner and president Aurelio De Laurentiis on Wednesday.

But just before midnight, Napoli issued a statement confirming his dismissal.

There was a downbeat mood right from the start of the game when the hosts were greeted by a lukewarm reception, with the San Paolo stadium less than one quarter full.

But Napoli responded brightly, Kalidou Koulibaly scrapping the crossbar immediately with a header.

Vandevoordt then collected a pass in his penalty area but was pressured by Napoli forwards and Milik had an easy job to score as the teenager lost the ball.

After Joseph Paintsil skimmed the post for Genk, Napoli went further ahead when Allan sent Giovanni Di Lorenzo down the right and his cross was turned in at the near post by Milik.

Allan then sent Calderon through and he flicked the ball over Vandevoordt, was tripped and Milik converted from the spot.

When Casper de Norre gave away another penalty with a handball it was Mertens who converted with a Panenka-style chip down the middle of the goal to complete Napoli's first win since Oct 23.

Former Chelsea, Real Madrid and Bayer Munich coach Ancelotti led Napoli to second place in Serie A last season but his team has suffered a loss of form this term and they fell out with De Laurentiis after he ordered the players to be confined to a week-long training camp.

Liverpool 2, Salzburg 0
Liverpool moved into the last 16



Dortmund goalkeeper Roman Buerki jumps for the ball between Dortmund's Mats Hummels (left), and Dortmund's Julian Brandt (right), during the Champions League Group F soccer match between Borussia Dortmund and Slavia Praha in Dortmund, Germany on Dec 10. (AP)



Salzburg's Maximilian Wober (left), jumps for a header with Liverpool's Roberto Firmino during the Group E Champions League soccer match between Salzburg and Liverpool in Salzburg, Austria on Dec 10. (AP)

of the Champions League with a 2-0 victory over Salzburg as a potentially tricky encounter turned into a second-half cruise with quickfire goals from Naby Keita and Mohamed Salah.

Juergen Klopp's side needed a point in Austria to be sure of qualification and after missing several good chances in the first half, they ended up with a comfortable win which should have been by a more convincing margin.

Two goals inside two second-half minutes from Keita and Salah, with the Egyptian finding the net with an exquisite finish from a tight angle, helped Liverpool finish top of Group E with 13 points.

Although the away defeat and home draw with Carlo Ancelotti's Napoli had left Liverpool on edge going into the final round of games, their superior quality showed in the end.

With much at stake for two attacking sides, the game began in a frantic and open fashion and Liverpool keeper Alisson Becker had to be alert in the seventh minute to keep out a close-range effort from South Korean Hwang Hee-chan after good work from the lively Japanese forward Takumi Minamoto.

Mane missed a good opportunity, curling wide from the edge of the box and then brought Salzburg keeper Cican Stankovic into action with a diagonal drive.

Highly-rated Norwegian striker Erling Haaland, who has been linked with

a move to Manchester United, failed to make the most of space inside the box and his low shot was easily dealt with by the Liverpool keeper.

The biggest chance of the half came in the 29th minute when Keita put in Salah, but unmarked and inside the box, the Egyptian's shot was badly off target.

Chelsea 2, Lille 1

Chelsea survived a nerve-jangling finale to their 2-1 win over Lille, eventually holding on to clinch a place in the Champions League knock-out stages thanks to first-half goals from Tammy Abraham and captain Cesar Azpilicueta.

Chelsea, who needed a victory to make sure of qualification, had gone five Champions League games at Stamford Bridge without a victory, their longest such run at home in the competition.

They dominated almost the entire game yet Lille, who were already condemned to the bottom spot of Group H and fielded an under-strength side, scored in the 78th minute and came close to a late equaliser that would have eliminated Chelsea.

Victory left Chelsea second in the group on 11 points behind Valencia, who won 1-0 at Ajax Amsterdam, consigning the Dutch champions to third place and elimination. Lille ended with just one point.

After dominating the opening proceedings in a downpour and swirling wind, Chelsea went ahead in the 19th minute when US striker Christian Pulisic darted forward to feed William and the Brazilian's cut-back cross was turned in by Abraham.

The Londoners doubled their lead in the 35th minute when Azpilicueta shook off his marker to score with a close-range header from a corner by Emerson.

But what had looked like being a comfortable night for the Blues proved anything but once former Chelsea striker Loic Remy pulled a goal back for Lille with his shot going in off the underside of the bar.

Dortmund 2, Slavia 1

Borussia Dortmund beat Slavia Prague 2-1 with goals from Jadon Sancho and Julian Brandt to advance to the Champions League knockout stage, leaving Italian side Inter Milan in third place of Group F.

The win put the Germans, who also had keeper Roman Buerki to thank with more than half a dozen sensational saves, on 10 points in second place, three ahead of Inter who lost 2-1 to already-qualified group winners Barcelona.

Sancho put the hosts ahead in the 10th and Dortmund could have added at least two more when Marco Reus twice had only keeper Ondrej Kolar to beat but was denied on both occasions.

With the Germans having to better Inter's result against Barca to advance, the Czechs gradually found space and forced keeper Buerki to three outstanding saves, including an off-balance one-handed one, in the first half.

But he was well beaten when Tomas Soucek completed a lightning-quick attack in the 43rd level.

Valencia 1, Ajax 1

Valencia's Rodrigo scored the game's only goal as they upset hosts Ajax Amsterdam 1-0 to finish top of Champions League Group H and eliminate the Dutch title winners from this season's competition.

The 24th-minute strike from the Brazil-born Spain international saw Valencia finish ahead of Chelsea, 2-1 victors over Lille, by virtue of the head-to-

head result between the two teams, as both ended on 11 points to Ajax's 10.

Ajax, the fairytale story of last season's competition with their giant-slaying run from the early preliminary rounds to the semifinal, had needed only to draw their last group game to advance to the last-16.

Yet they looked flat and listless in going down to the Spanish side, who ended with 10 men after the sending off of Gabriel Paulista in stoppage time. The Dutch champions drop down to the Europa League after finishing third.

Rodrigo enjoyed the game's key moment, burying the ball into the top right-hand corner after being teed up by a clever dummy from Ferran Torres, who first feinted to shoot before passing.

The unlikely win left Valencia coach Albert Celades thrilled. "We've had a very good group stage, and to finish top of the group is something. It's all down to the boys," he said.

Ajax had begun the game looking confident but were sloppy in their execution and failed to make use of their dominance of possession with uncharacteristically slow build-ups.

Lyon 2, Leipzig 2

Olympique Lyonnais fought back from 2-0 down to snatch a 2-2 draw against RB Leipzig thanks to a late Memphis Depay goal that sent the French club through to the Champions League's last 16.

Dutch striker Depay found the back of the net eight minutes from fulltime after Hassem Aouar's superb second-half goal had reduced the deficit with Lyon having conceded two first-half penalties in a catastrophic start at the Groupama Stadium.

Leipzig topped the group with 11 points while Lyon finished second on eight points.

Benfica, who finished with seven points, will play in the Europa League knockout phase after finishing ahead of Zenit St Petersburg thanks to a better head-to-head record following a 3-0 home win against the Russian side.

Lyon got off to a woeful start as Leipzig were awarded a penalty following a VAR review after keeper Anthony Lopes had tripped Yussuf Poulsen.

Zenit 3, Benfica 0

Zenit St Petersburg missed out on a place in the Champions League last-16 when they lost 3-0 away to Benfica in their final Group G match and finished bottom of the table.

Despite being outplayed, 10-man Zenit were minutes away from finishing in second place until Olympique Lyonnais scored an 82nd minute goal to snatch a 2-2 draw at home to already-qualified RB Leipzig to go through instead.

Olympique finished with eight points in the first half but Benfica went ahead two minutes after the break when a neat passing exchange created space for Pizzi on the left and the Benfica captain sent in a low cross which Franco Cervi turned in.



Depay